# MERA NAAM JOKER IN THE FELLINIESQUE CARNIVAL: A STUDY OF DIRECTOR RAJ KAPOOR AND FEDERICO FELLINI

# MERA NAAM JOKER' IN THE FELLINIESQUE CARNIVAL: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF DIRECTORS RAJ KAPOOR AND FEDERICO FELLINI

*Author: Abishek Budhathoki*

## 1.1 Abstract

This dissertation embarks on a comparative analysis, honing in on Raj Kapoor's influential work "Mera Naam Joker (1970)" and the oeuvre of the Italian Director "Federico Fellini". Through a lens sharpened by deconstructive analysis, the research navigates the labyrinthine depths of these maestros' directorial visions, dissecting the thematic resonances and divergences within the framework of the Felliniesque carnival in Raj Kapoor's film. Through meticulous analysis, this study unveils the thematic parallel between Kapoor's and Fellini's cinematic languages, unraveling the existential undercurrents, socio-political commentary. By scrutinizing their influences, stylistic choices, narrative structures, thematic elements and philosophical underpinnings in their films. The research offers an extensive vista into the transcendent realms of cinema, where Kapoor and Fellini converge as maestros of the human condition, orchestrating symphonies of laughter, tears, and introspection into the carnival of life.

Keyword: Raj Kapoor, Mera Naam Joker ,Federico Fellini, Cinema, Thematic Analysis

## 1.2 Introduction

This study explores a compelling parallel of directorial visions between two maestros of cinema – Raj Kapoor and Federico Fellini. A comparative study of Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' with Fellini's repertoire including, 'La Dolce Vita (1960)', 'La Strada (1954)', 'Amarcord (1973)' and, '8½ (1963)'.

First, the term '*Felliniesque'* which is used to describe the directorial style of Federico Fellini. The adjective is precisely used to encapsulate the characteristics of Federico Fellini's oeuvre, The term '*Felliniesque*' refers to the construction of the world in Fellini's films, the narrative, characters, set pieces, costumes, surrealistic dreamscapes, blurring the line between fantasy and realism, often with the touch of humanism. Having established the term 'Felliniesque', the focus can be lifted to the thematic resonances and divergences within the framework of the Felliniesque carnival in Raj Kapoor's film 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' as it mirrors the quintessential Fellinian (mean: embodies the spirits of Fellini's cinematic universe) Aesthetic. Comparing their influences, stylistic choices, narrative structures, thematic elements, and philosophical underpinnings in their films, dissecting 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' through thematic and stylistic parallels and the Fellini's Federico Fellini's 'La Dolce Vita (1960)', 'La Strada (1954)', 'Amarcord (1973)', and '8½ (1963)'.

Through thematic analysis, the study is based on a comparative analysis of Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' and Federico Fellini's 'La Strada (1954)'. Titled 'The Circus of Life,' this analysis delves into the social, philosophical, and psychological dimensions of both films. Set in the circus world, these films unravel the complexities of human existence, orchestrating symphonies of laughter, tears, and introspection into the carnival of life. This study provides a comprehensive comparative analysis, highlighting the intricate narratives and character study that reflect the similarites in the directorial style of the directors and thematic preoccupations.

## 1.5 Objectives of the Study

To study and compare the directorial styles of Raj Kapoor and Federico Fellini, identifying the elements that define the 'Felliniesque Carnival' and juxtaposing how these characteristics manifest in Raj Kapoor's "Mera Naam Joker" (1970). Fellini's films include "La Dolce Vita" (1960), "Amarcord" (1973), and "8½" (1963).

Additionally, the thematic resonance and divergence will be studied by examining the similarities and differences in the thematic and narrative structure between "Mera Naam Joker" (1970) and Fellini's "La Strada" (1954).

## 1.6 Research Questions

The term 'Felliniesque' embodies Fellini's directorial style, known for its whimsical and surreal storytelling that blends reality and fantasy. Fellini's films feature vibrant characters, elaborate set pieces, and a mix of humor and emotion, often exploring themes of identity and human desire. His narratives are accompanied by Nino Rota's music, which adds to the surrealist dream like quality. Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker' (1970) shows similarities to this style with its em yet fanciful story, grand visuals, and balance of comedy and emotion. Both 'Mera Naam Joker' and Fellini's 'La Strada' (1954) delve into the lives of traveling performers, focusing on love, loss, and the search for meaning. While 'La Strada' has a more realistic approach, 'Mera Naam Joker' includes more dramatic and spectacular elements. However, both films show deep understanding for their characters, portraying their challenges and victories with care and insight.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, comparative film analysis to explore and compare the directorial styles of Raj Kapoor and Federico Fellini.

## 2.2 Data Collection Film Selection Criteria

The films selected for this study include Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' and Federico Fellini's 'La Dolce Vita (1960)', 'La Strada (1954)', 'Amarcord (1973)', and '8½ (1963)'. These films were chosen for their significance in showing both the directors' styles.

## 2.3 Data Analysis: Comparative Film Analysis

A framework was developed to compare the films based on Thematic elements.

## 2.4 Thematic Analysis

Themes were identified and analyzed to understand the parallels and divergences between the films of Raj Kapoor and Federico Fellini. The study was conducted by juxtaposing elements from the films of both directors through a thematic analysis. To achieve this, I watched the selected films, specifically 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' among others, and examined literary texts and critiques written about these films. During this process, I took screengrabs and meticulously noted down key elements, scenes, and motifs from each film. These elements were then methodically compared and contrasted to identify common thematic elements and symbolism.

# ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## 3.1 The Felliniesque Carnvial

Federico Fellini, an Italian film director, rose to prominence during the '60s and '70s, the term *Felliniesque* (Like *Kafkaesque*) is characterized by his surreal, dreamlike qualities and extravagant visuals. The term '*Felliniesque*' has since become synonymous with a distinct blend of the whimsical and the profound, started with more aligned to the neorealism movement of the time, later became more surrealist and stylized visual imagery which was then termed the 'Felliniesque'. *"Felliniesque! "I have always aspired to be an adjective," laughed Fellini, adding: "Even if I don't understand what it means. It is the style that identifies the artist, the stamp that distinguishes him from anyone else, becoming the mirror into which those who gaze can recognize themselves. In cinema Fellini has fully unfolded his universe, which, miraculously, often seems to be our own: many recognize themselves there, and in so doing they feel absolved, less alone, less guilty" (*Waller, Gubareva, & Burke, 2020, p. 33).

The idea that a director must possess a personal style that makes them distinct from any other director was introduced in '*Auteur Theory* (Truffaut, 1954)' by French filmmaker and critic François Truffaut in his 1954 essay "Une certaine tendance du cinéma français" ("A Certain Tendency in French Cinema"), published in January 1954 on Cahiers du cinéma Magazine. Truffaut argued that the director of a film should be regarded as an author, akin to the author of a novel or book, serving as the primary creative force behind the work. He lamented that certain films were essentially the creations of writers, with the director merely executing their vision on screen. This emphasis on the director's dominance over the work was of paramount importance to the critics at Cahiers du Cinéma, with Truffaut observing that *"the directors are, and wish to be, responsible for the scenarios and dialogues that they illustrate" (*Staples, 1966). Fellini epitomizes the concept of the auteur director, with his distinctive style challenging conventional notions of romantic individualism and the artist's persona. From his idiosyncratic

visual imagery to the satirical and comedic dialogue, Fellini's films possess a singular identity that sets them apart from others. The visual manner of a fislmmaker is more often called his style. It could involve such elements of mise-en-scene as costumes, sets, lighting, and the blocking out of character movement before the camera; or the Almmaker's use of the camera itself; of his method and rhythm of editing his shots within a sequence and his method of editing his sequences within the structure of the entire film." (Stubbs, 1993).

To further illustrate the Felliniesque carnival, this analysis will now turn the director's most celebrated films - the 1960 masterpiece 'La Dolce Vita (1960)', as it encapsulates the Fellini's style as a director, although other works will be explored later. For example, visual extravaganza, elaborate costumes, dazzling lights, vibrant decoration, and the world of excess and luxury are prominent in the film "La Dolce Vita (1960)" which put him on the world cinema. The Fellinian approach embodies a parodic and caricatural essence, an amplification of reality reflected through the distorted lens of a carnival mirror" (Rohdie, 2002). Amidst the glitz and glamour, the carnival and extravaganza become a symbol of hedonism and the glamorous life of post-war Italy. The iconic opening sequence of "La Dolce Vita (1960)" where the helicopter flys around the iconic landmarks of Rome including the Colosseum, St. Peter's Basilica, and the Tiber River, juxtaposed between the ancient beauty of Rome and the modernity of the helicopter carrying a religious symbol suggests that even sacred symbols are subjected to the same kind of attention and commodification as celebrities and sets the tone for the lavish and hedonistic world of the Roman elite that Marcello, the protagonist, inhabits, where spectacle often masks the emptiness and spiritual decay beneath the surface. Federico Fellini's visual extravagance, epitomized by his distinctive visual aesthetics. As Stubbs (1993) elucidates, a comprehensive analysis of a filmmaker's discourse, or 'syushet,' entails probing into various facets, such as the structural organization of the narrative and the visual language employed throughout the film. In the case of Fellini, the exploration of narrative discourse unveils a departure from conventional storytelling conventions, as he often eschews strict chronological order in favor of a nonlinear narrative approach. Fellini's penchant for commencing his narratives in medias res, coupled with the judicious

use of flashbacks, serves to unravel the complexities of his characters' lives and memories, propelling the audience into a rich tapestry of past, present, and future (Stubbs, 1993). Moreover, Fellini's narrative discourse transcends the traditional cause-and-effect paradigm prevalent in classical Hollywood cinema. Instead of adhering to a linear trajectory leading to a definitive resolution, his narratives are often characterized by a loose linkage of sequences, driven by the desire to explore thematic depth or character complexity (Stubbs, 1993). This discourse of revelation aligns with the ethos of European art cinema, particularly prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s, where narrative coherence gives way to thematic exploration and existential inquiry. In tandem with his innovative narrative discourse, Fellini's visual style emerges as a defining aspect of his filmmaking prowess. Stubbs (1993) delineates the myriad elements comprising a filmmaker's visual manner, ranging from mise-en-scène to cinematography and editing techniques. Fellini's mise-en-scène is characterized by elaborate costumes, intricate sets, and atmospheric lighting, meticulously crafted to evoke a sense of surrealism and theatricality. Additionally, his masterful utilization of the camera, coupled with rhythmic editing, imbues his films with a hypnotic cadence, heightening the emotional resonance of each scene and sequence (Stubbs, 1993).

The Fellinian notion of the world as a '*circus-stage*' is prominent in the film, the lighting and camera movement is such that the streets of Rome feel like a stage where the eccentric celebrities, aristocrats and bizarre party guests are performing a play. Rome feels like a big circus, where grotesque characters perform for an audience, whether it's the paparazzi following celebrities or the socialites attending glamour parties. The constant movement and chaos of the city evoke a circus, where there's always something new and exciting happening.Within the Fellini realm, a classical beauty such as the Swedish photo model Anita Ekberg who is featured in the famous Trevi Fountain scene in La Dolce Vita (1960) was sure to have a strong effect on the viewers. "Fellini understood perfectly that enlarged on a wide screen, a model turned into a movie star – and Ekberg would definitely become 'bigger than life' and a dream figure if ever there was one. In fact, this was exactly her role in La Dolce Vita (1960). Later she reappeared as a gigantic and slightly horrifying billboard monstrosity in the short film Le tentazione del Dottor Anto-

nio (included in the anthology film Boccaccio ’70 (De Sica, Visconti, Fellini, Monicelli, 1962).”(Di Chiara & Van Den Oever, 2013). The larger-than-life character of , Sylvia, the American actress portrayed by Anita Ekberg, with her iconic imagery, Trevi Fountain scene where Sylvia wades into the water, drawing Marcello into a surreal encounter. These sequences disrupt the narrative flow and transport the audience into a realm of fantasy, where desires and emotions take precedence over rationality. In Fellini's movies like "La Strada (1954)" (1954) and "8½ (1963)" (1963), there is a humanistic element to the story. Bondanella (2002) highlights that his films frequently center on the personal and emotional growth of his characters, showcasing their vulnerabilities, aspirations, and existential challenges. In the film "La Strada (1954)," Fellini depicts a deep bond between Gelsomina and Zampanò, highlighting themes of purity, roughness, and salvation. Likewise, in the film "8½ (1963)," he explores the filmmaker's internal struggles with creativity and existential dilemmas through surreal and introspective scenes that uncover the intricacies of identity and fulfillment. According to Bondanella (2002), Fellini's films are identified by their emphasis on the importance and compassion for individuals, even in the face of life's absurdities and tragedies. This humanistic viewpoint is a fundamental aspect of Fellini's film heritage.

Fellini is renowned for various elements, including his extravagant, dreamlike processions of bizarre figures meandering through the streets of Rome (or Rimini), accompanied by the whimsical musical compositions of Nino Rota. Over time, these grotesque processions and discordant melodies evolved into the hallmark of Fellini's cinema, famously dubbed 'circus Fellini'. While one might argue that this spectacular dimension has always been intrinsic to his filmmaking, it became more pronounced, absurd, and vibrant in his later works. Essentially, Fellini's world is a realm of grotesqueness, clownishness, and carnival-esque chaos; nothing adheres to norms, proportions, or orderliness; everything is warped, deformed, disproportionate, exaggerated, vibrant, abundant, comedic, and energetically vivid. Each character is rendered peculiar in some manner. "A notable example is the voluptuous woman selling cigarettes to the perplexed young protagonist in 'Amarcord (1973)'. She epitomizes exaggerated feminine attributes, overwhelming the protagonist as he attempts to lift her. Another memorable scene depicts a

whimsical parade of nuns, bishops, and cardinals flaunting absurd attire on a makeshift runway within the Vatican, reminiscent of a fashion show, with nuns resembling extraterrestrials and cardinals resembling schoolgirls. This scene from 'Roma' highlights Fellini's adeptness at transforming the theatricality and visual richness of Catholic traditions into his own exaggerated and slightly distorted portrayal of Roman life. "In Fellini's universe, everything is larger than life, from the towering female figures to the diminutive nun in close-up shots. The exhibition convincingly demonstrates Fellini's tendency to lean towards the comedic side of the grotesque spectrum. He often distorts and enlarges characters' bodily proportions to evoke a sense of the fantastic, drawing viewers into his imaginative realm and eliciting a blend of emotions in response. While his world is infused with humor, it seldom prompts outright laughter. Fellini's realm is one of dreams, where the transition from reality to imagination is abrupt and disorienting, unsettling the viewer. These are the fundamental elements of the grotesque aesthetics. *"As the German scholar Wolfgang Kayser once remarked in his seminal work on grotesque art, 'it is our world – and it is not'.* Exactly as Fellini himself frequently asserted: it is Rome (or Rimini), and yet it is not. It's as though Fellini ingested the fleeting visuals of everyday life, processed them through his unique perspective, and regurgitated them in his films in a distinctive manner. This creative method likely originated in Fellini's early career as a graphic artist for a satirical magazine. Interestingly, many of his collaborators from that magazine eventually transitioned to filmmaking. Even in his early drawings, Fellini combined humor with deformation, indicating how graphic art influenced his adoption of a grotesque stance towards reality." (Di Chiara & Van Den Oever, 2013) Through his grotesque aesthetic, Fellini challenges conventional perceptions of reality, inviting audiences to embark on a journey into the absurd and the sublime. In summary, Fellini's grotesque aesthetic transcends mere visual spectacle, offering profound insights into the human condition and the interplay between reality and imagination. By embracing the comic side of the grotesque spectrum, Fellini crafts a dreamlike world where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, inviting viewers to question the very essence of existence.

In examining Fellini’s method of criticising society and humanism, it is noticeable that his films go beyond the area of political debate.. In the realm of cinema, Federico Fellini

emerges as a provocative voice, challenging the predominant currents of his time, particularly socialist realism (Broutman et al., 1954). In his critique, Fellini vehemently contends that socialist realism devolves into mere propaganda, shackled by its unwavering focus on socialist ideology. His divergence from this cinematic tradition stems from a profound interest not in the societal roles his characters inhabit, but rather in their inner workings—their actions, their thoughts, their very essence. In a seminal 1959 interview, Fellini boldly declared the demise of neo-realism as a movement fixated solely on social realities.

" *According to Pasolini, who collaborated on the dialogue for Le notti di Cabiria (Nights of Cabiria 1957), Fellinian realism has a basic instinctive quality that is not shaped by a strong referential ideology, and that manifests itself in the realm of the "creature, lost and alone," left "to despair and to rejoice in a mysterious world* (Waller, Gubareva, & Burke, 2020, p. 176)".

Instead, he advocated for a shift towards a deeper exploration of humanity's metaphysical and psychological dimensions. For Fellini, the narrow confines of socialist realism fail to capture the complexity of the human experience, relegating cinema to a tool of ideological indoctrination. Central to Fellini's dissent is his belief that the essence of humanity transcends the confines of social constructs and political ideologies. He adamantly argues that socialist realism, with its rigid adherence to Marxist doctrine, stifles the filmmaker's ability to delve into the intricacies of human psychology and emotion. Rather than portraying individuals as mere embodiments of class struggle, Fellini champions a cinema that celebrates the individual, recognizing their unique journey as a gateway to universal truths about the human condition. In essence, Fellini's cinematic philosophy is grounded in the conviction that the authenticity of human relationships and emotions supersedes the dogma of ideological discourse. His oeuvre, epitomized by films like La Strada (1954), serves as a testament to his unwavering commitment to exploring the depths of human experience, unfettered by the constraints of political doctrine (Broutman et al., 1954). As Fellini himself once reflected, his fascination with the complexities of human interaction and communication stems from a deeply personal place—a quest for genuine connection that resonates throughout his work. In this pur-

suit, he finds solace in the belief that the bonds forged between individuals, fraught with imperfections and uncertainties, hold within them the profound truths of what it means to be human. Through his cinematic lens, Fellini invites audiences to confront the paradoxes of existence, navigating the labyrinth of human emotion with a sense of wonder and awe. In his divergence from socialist realism, Fellini emerges not merely as a filmmaker, but as a philosopher-poet, weaving together the disparate threads of human experience into a tapestry of profound beauty and complexity. In doing so, he challenges us to reconsider the very essence of cinema itself—not merely as a reflection of social realities, but as a mirror held up to the soul of humanity.

"The term 'Decadence' initially didn't connote literary or artistic concepts nor did it describe a decline in vitality within individuals or families; instead, it was first employed to delineate the decline and eventual collapse of the Roman Empire. For centuries following the demise of antiquity, the fall of Rome served as a focal point for profound contemplation regarding the reasons and circumstances behind humanity's descent from power and grandeur. From Polybius to Montesquieu and Gibbon, myriad explanations, spanning moral, religious, and political realms, were proffered to elucidate Rome's downfall: the erosion of public morality, the erosion of republican freedoms, the decline of ancient religions, and, according to Gibbon, the undermining impact of Christianity's ascendancy. Beneath these diverse explanations, however, resided a singularly unified theme: the impermanence of all things, whether natural or human-made, destined for eventual oblivion" (Rasch, 1982). "A*esthetic decadence, a distinct historical phenomenon with profound implications for subsequent avant-garde culture, came to be known as 'il decadentismo'. Why decadentism? Binni elucidated that fin de siècle critics of the avant-garde disparaged the new art as decadent, yet the vilified artists welcomed the epithet, perceiving decadence as a new epoch, a conquest, a sui generis humanism that encompassed all moral and artistic life. Gleefully subverting bourgeois values, decadence metamorphosed into a badge of honor in the battle against the soulless materialism of the modern era" (Drake, R., 1982).*

"The Fellinian image is an affective image, charged with sentimentality and, at the same time, a caricatural stylization" (Waller, Gubareva, & Burke, 2020, p. 76)."The terms

'decadent' and 'decadence' were frequently applied to Fellini's films, initially by contemporary critics and subsequently by film historians. Many referred to the imagery and themes of corruption and disintegration, particularly evident in four films: 'La Dolce Vita (1960)' (1960), 'Toby Dammit' (episode of 'Histoires extraordinaires/Tre passi nel delirio/Spirits of the Dead' 1968), 'Fellini - Satyricon' (1969), and 'Il Casanova di Federico Fellini' (Fellini's Casanova 1976)" (Waller, Gubareva, & Burke, 2020, p. 33). 'La Dolce Vita (1960)' (1960) signifies a pivotal juncture for Fellini. Transitioning into a new decade, he sheds the vestiges of neorealism, reinventing himself stylistically and thematically. 'La Dolce Vita (1960)' also inaugurates what could be deemed an existential trilogy, including '8½ (1963)' and 'Il Casanova di Federico Fellini', and marks Fellini's foray into decadent aesthetics" (Waller, Gubareva, & Burke, 2020, p. 33). "Pier Paolo Pasolini, in his 1960 review of 'La Dolce Vita (1960)', spoke of 'a resurgence of the taste and ideology characteristic of the European literature of the Decadent Movement (decadentismo).' In line with decadent art, women are depicted as vessels of temptation and salvation, as well as elemental forces. Conversely, the protagonist is depicted as weak and passive, immersed in a flaccid atmosphere that induces hallucinations and lethargy, evoking protagonists from decadent literature" (Taddei, 1960; de Palacio, 1990). The opening to the film 8 1⁄2 is a perfect summation of the filmmaking style of Federico Fellini. It highlights the Italian director’s penchant for juxtaposing the real with the imaginary, or the surreal. The scene, which focuses on the psychological state of the character Guido, demonstrates Fellini’s ability to use film as a tool for examining the human psyche. He succeeds in creating scenery that is fantastic and ambiguous, yet real and strangely familiar, much like the mind itself. It should stand as no surprise that in his attempt to analyze the human condition, Fellini’s work is informed by psychoanalytic theory, especially that of Carl Gustav Jung (Hayes, 2005).

Fellini's vocabulary embodies the hallmarks of decadence: vivid, unconventional, bizarre, highly literary, featuring expressive pastiches from various sources. This decadent cultural paradigm primarily eschews rationality and criticality, favoring technicality and poetics. As observed, Fellini's approach embodies an unveiling of enigma and an inclination toward visual extravagance. While his films may vary in plot and character

portrayal, they share a fundamental structural coherence in style. At a deeper level, Fellini employs consistent strategies in shaping discourse and presenting visual elements, aiming to render the subject matter unfamiliar and transcend conventional limitations. These strategies converge in their pursuit of evoking the elusive and inexplicable essence of existence. Although the elusive nature of life defies clear depiction, Fellini skilfully hints at its presence through art that stretches the boundaries of perception. By pushing the boundaries of artistic expression, Fellini prompts viewers to ponder the mysterious dimensions of existence, compelling them to engage with the work on a profound level. In this way, the films of Federico Fellini repeatedly assert the ineffable essence of life.

## 3.2 Mera Naam Joker in the Felliniesque Carnival

Raj Kapoor is an Indian film director, active particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, is considered one of the most prominent figures in the Indian film industry, recognized as “The Showman of Indian Cinema”. Kapoor's film-making approach developed to include surrealism and increased stylization. As Kapoor's career advanced, his movies depicted the challenges and dreams of ordinary people in India after gaining independence. Kapoor's artistic talent resonated with many, solidifying his reputation as one of the most visionary figures in Indian cinema.The film's theme begins with Raju's journey from a young age *(portrayed by Rishi Kapoor as a schoolboy with dreams of becoming a Joker)* to follow in his father's footsteps as a Joker, who tragically passed away while performing in a circus. His journey is depicted in a beautiful way as a young student, mixed with his affection for his instructor, Mary, portrayed by Simi. He takes on the role of a circus clown, now portrayed by Raj Kapoor, as his mother's health worsens. To please his disapproving mother, Raju lies about getting a different job. Unfortunately, she suffers a heart attack and passes away while watching him perform. Her wish for a daughter-in-law remains unmet until she notices Marina, a Russian trapeze artist portrayed by Rabinkina, whom Raju eventually falls in love with. In the final section, he is in a romantic relationship with a street artist who dreams of becoming a successful film actor.

This section highlights the difference between the straightforward nature of a Joker and the ambitious nature of 'Minu', and compares a Joker with a film star as being completely different (Thakor, 2020). Truffaut's '*Auteur Theory* (Truffaut, 1954)' suggests that a director's directorical style establish them as the main authour of a film, similar to how a novelist is the author of a novel. This theory expalins how the director holds control over the entireity of the film, focusing their responsibility for the scripts and narrative they portray. Raj Kapoor's movies are characterized by a distinct combination of social commentary, melodrama, and extravagant set pieces, creating a unique visual and storytelling that is clearly of his own style. His careful focus on details like costumes, sets, and narrative, characters movement, combined with his beautiful cinematography and visual storytelling, solidifies his reputation as a auteur director. Similar to Fellini, Kapoor's distinct visual style characterize his unique cinematic style, setting his films apart and making them stand out.

For Fellini, comic strips served as an imaginative refuge from the oppressive strictures of Fascist Italy during his youth, with the whimsical realms of Winsor McCay's Little Nemo and Frederic Opper's vibrant creations leaving an indelible impact. This early immersion in the boundless potential of art manifested in Fellini's later films, which exhibited a tendency for comic book aesthetics through extravagant set designs, as evidenced by the meticulous constructions in 'Roma (1972)' that evoked the vivid panels of a graphic novel. Fellini's lifelong devotion to this art form culminated in his collaboration with the renowned Milo Manara to adapt an unrealized script into illustrated form. Mirroring this obsession, Kapoor's love for he Archie Comics came during his adolescence, influencing his decision to infuse Mera Naam Joker with a youthful ebullience by casting real teenagers, thereby capturing the raw emotional authenticity he associated with his beloved comic book tales. This shared affinity for the surreal realms of art transcended mere stylistic homage, permeating the metaphysical dimensions of their respective cinema. 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)', is an exploration of the human condition is carefilly depicted through the setting of a enitre word as a "circus stage". Similar to Federico Fellini's oveure, the film delves into the contrast between existentialism and realism, portraying the complexities of life through the character of Raju, a clown who expresses

both joy and sorrow. The vibrant and captivating cimematography of the circus, along with the constant interplay of emotions, serve as a poignant reflection of life's unpredictable nature and the eternal pursuit of happiness. ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ became a clut classic for its narrative structure, presenting the life of protagonist Raju through a series of flashbacks that delve into his childhood, comingof age, and adulthood. These different segments shows Raju's quest for love, belonging, and purpose, illustrating the challenges he stumbles at different points in his clown life. The episodic structure of the film provides a dive into Raju's complex character, reminiscent of Fellini's preference for thematic and character-driven narratives over conventional storytelling methods. The circus, a recurring theme, not only adds vibrancy to the film but also mirrors Raju's inner struggles and search for meaning. The film goes beyond individual challenges to explore universal themes such as identity, purpose, and the human condition. Kapoor's depiction of Raju as a clown who must always put on a show to hide his inner turmoil strikes a chord with the common experience of concealing true feelings. This representation highlights the film's exploration of existential dread, probing the fundamental differences between living in reality and constantly putting on a circus by the clown .‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ goes beyond the norms of Indian cinema during its era, weaving together a complex mix of human emotions and experiences and the struggle of an artist. With its unique storytelling, extravagant sets, and deep themes, the movie provides a thought-provoking reflection on the complexities of life, love, and the toughness of the human spirit. Kapoor's work stands as a timeless study of the contrast between what is the reality and the ongoing quest for happiness in the midst of challenges. The films of Raj Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ and Federico Fellini share a common thematic and stylistic taits in their portrayal of the world as a circus stage. Both directors use the circus as a metaphor to explore the theatric performative nature of human in the word, with characters navigating through various characters during their lifetime. In Fellini's works like La Dolce Vita (1960)’, and ‘‘8½ (1963)’ and in Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ , this idea is depicted, showcasing the choas and constant movement of life as a grand circus or a theatre. The visual aesthetic in "Mera Naam Joker" complements its themes through the use of set design, dramatic lighting, and camera techniques. This

technique is reminiscent of Fellini's approach in La Dolce Vita (1960)'," where lighting and camerawork transform Rome into a surreal setting as a stage. Both filmmakers employ exaggerated characters to comment on societal norms and performances. Additionally, both Kapoor and Fellini intricately explore the personal and emotional journeys of their characters, delving into themes of vulnerability, aspiration, and existential crisis. In Fellini's works like 'La Strada (1954)' and '8½ (1963)' there is a strong humanistic element that focuses on the emotional and physical challanges faced by the characters. Fellini emphasizes compassion and empathy for individual experiences as the individuals depicted in the films are honest in nature amidst life's absurdities and tragedies. Similarly, 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' portrays Raju's emotions sensitivity, highlighting his inner conflicts and desires. Kapoor, like Fellini, uses the circus as a metaphor to delve into the complexities of the human experience. When analyzing the cinematic styles of Federico Fellini, Raj Kapoor, and A.K. Abbas, one can uncover subtle similarities and differences in their approaches to critiquing society, exploring humanism, and addressing social issues. Fellini, in particular, stands out for his unique method of challenging societal norms and humanistic themes, going beyond mere political discourse and rejecting the idea of cinema as mere propaganda. Instead, he delves into the deeper aspects of humanity, exploring metaphysical and psychological dimensions. Fellini celebrates individual journeys and portrays characters as complex individuals rather than symbols of class conflict. Fellini believed that cinema should not be used as a tool for promoting political ideologies, but rather as a means of delving into the complexities of human emotion and psychology. He rejected the idea of reducing characters to mere representations of class struggle and instead focused on exploring the deeper aspects of humanity. In a famous interview in 1959, Fellini proclaimed the end of neo-realism and called for a shift towards a more profound examination of the metaphysical and psychological aspects of human existence. He was more interested in his characters' inner thoughts and actions than in their societal roles. At the core of Fellini's opposition was his belief in the importance of genuine human connections and emotions over rigid ideological beliefs. He advocated for a cinema that celebrated individuality and saw it as a pathway to understanding universal truths about humanity. Through films like 'La Strada (1954)'," Fellini

explored the complexities of human relationships and communication, driven by a desire for authentic connections. He believed that the imperfect and uncertain bonds between people held the key to understanding the essence of being human. According to Bawa (2018), the portrayal of women in Raj Kapoor's films has been a subject of considerable critique and discussion. Kapoor's cinema often depicted women in pivotal roles, yet it also faced allegations of voyeurism and objectification. Kapoor himself acknowledged these criticisms, explaining that his primary objective was to create entertaining films. This aim sometimes led him to commodify his female characters to achieve the desired cinematic impact. The complexity of his female characters is notable; they are neither simply one-dimensional nor easily defined. Kapoor's films exhibit a blend of modernity and tradition, which is also reflected in the multifaceted nature of his female characters. These characters often embody contradictions, ba ancing elements of Indian mythology with contemporary sensibilities (Bawa, 2018). Furthermore, Bawa (2018) discusses how Raj Kapoor's approach to depicting women evolved over different phases of his filmmaking career. During the early phase, known as the Nargis phase, the female characters were portrayed with strength and depth, contributing significantly to the films' narratives. However, in the later phase of his career, the portrayal of women shifted towards a more sensual and sexualized representation. Despite this shift, Kapoor maintained a certain level of aestion, avoiding the pitfalls of being categorized as a B-grade filmmaker. This evolution in his depiction of women was partly influenced by the changing dynamics of the Hindi film industry and the need to remain commercially viable in the face of emerging trends like the rise of action-oriented cinema during the Amitabh Bachchan era (Bawa, 2018). Federico Fellini and Raj Kapoor both demonstrate a strong fascination with societal norms, delving into humanism, and providing detailed criticisms of the human experience at the context of their time. Fellini's approach to critcizing society and humanism goes beyond political discussions particularly using socialist realism. He strongly opposes the use of cinema as an entertainment or mere propaganda, urging for a more profound study of the metaphysical and psychological aspects of humanity. Fellini's works, represented by ‘La Strada (1954)’, ‘8½ (1963)’ and ‘La Dolce Vita (1960)’, celebrate the personal journey, depicting characters as multidimensional

individuals in the human experience rather than just symbols of social conflict. Fellini's cinematic philosophy is centered on refusing to limit cinema to being just ideological propaganda. He strongly objected to the idea of characters being reduced to symbols of class conflict, and advocated for a more complex examination of human emotions and psychology. Fellini believed that the core of being human goes beyond social norms and political beliefs, with cinema being a potent tool for portraying the intricacies of human life. Fellini mentions the end of neo-realism as a movement focused only on societal truths, calling for a move towards a more profound examination of the metaphysical and psychological aspects of humanity. His departure from socialist realism came from a deep fascination not with the societal roles his characters played, but with their internal workings - their behaviors, their ideas, their fundamental nature. Fellini believed that the genuineness of human connections and feelings is more important than following ideological beliefs. He supported a form of film that honored the person, acknowledging their personal experience as a pathway to discovering overall truths about being human. Fellini's body of work, exemplified by movies such as ‘La Strada (1954)’," functioned as a testimony to his artistic legacy Kapoor enhances the film's social commentary by incorporating nonlinear storytelling and symbolism. Kapoor invites audiences to contemplate on the human experience and life's challenges by combining Raju's past and present. The repeating theme of the circus, characterized by its vibrant personalities and grand displays, symbolizes the human experience, in which people maneuver through the ups and downs of life's circus-like show. Essentially, ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ is a cinematic masterpiece that effortlessly combines humanistic themes with understated social commentary. Abbas's screenplay enhances the story with Marxist elements, effectively analyzing social disparities and the capitalist system. In the circus scene featuring Raju, the audience's laughter and applause highlight the contrast with his inner turmoil and sorrow. This contrast emphasizes how societal views are shallow compared to personal emotions. Another touching moment is when Raju's mother is depicted as embodying genuine love and willingness to make sacrifices, standing in stark contrast to the superficial and materialistic society. The last part emphasizes the fragility and strength of the human spirit as Raju experiences betrayal and heartbreak from his beloved. When

we compare Fellini and Kapoor, we notice that Fellini criticizes the strict ideology of socialist realism, while Kapoor, in Abbas's screenplay, discusses social problems within the framework of Indian culture and values, mixing humanism with social criticism. Both directors utilize original storytelling methods to communicate their ideas: Fellini incorporates surrealism and dream sequences, while Kapoor incorporates circus symbolism and nonlinear storytelling. In the end, Fellini is seen as a philosopher-poet of film, questioning political beliefs, whereas Kapoor is viewed as a visionary in Indian cinema, presenting a profoundly humanistic outlook centered on compassion and the changing influence of real connections. 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' is a prime example of Raj as it depicts a wide range of human experiences and offers nuanced social commentary. The circus serves as a potent metaphorical representation of societal artifice and superficiality in the film. It is depicted as a microcosmic realm where joy and spectacle are meticulously constructed to obfuscate the underlying sorrow and existential turmoil experienced by the performers. This setting reflects the decadent literary preoccupation with the dichotomy between appearance and reality, underscoring how societal norms and prescribed roles often mask the deeper, more complex truths of human existence. The utilization of the circus as a central motif parallels the decadent fascination with artifice and the grotesque, inviting audiences to interrogate the authenticity and meaning behind societal interactions. he protagonist, Raju, embodies the decadence aesthetic through the oscillation of his life between fleeting moments of joy and prolonged periods of despair. His narrative trajectory, characterized by emotional peaks and valleys, mirrors the instability and fragmentation that is emblematic of decadent literature. Raju's relationships with various female characters, each representing distinct facets of love, loss, and disillusionment, further accentuate this thematic undercurrent. While deeply personal, these relationships serve as broader commentaries on societal expectations and norms, reflecting the inherent fragility and vulnerability of human connections. Raju's character evokes the passive, emotionally vulnerable figures commonly found in decadent literary works. His inability to attain lasting happiness or fulfillment underscores the film's exploration of the impermanence of human desires and the futility of seeking permanence in an ever-changing world. The women in Raju's life symbolize

both idealized love and sources of profound emotional anguish, embodying the contradictory forces of temptation and salvation. This duality aligns with the portrayal of women in decadent literature, where they are often depicted as both aesthetic ideals and moral ambiguities. Visually, the film employs a rich and elaborate mise-en-scène that enhances its decadent aesthetic. The vibrant color palette, juxtaposed with a melancholic tone, evokes a dreamlike surrealism. The recurrent utilization of motifs, such as the circus tent and the clown's mask, serves not only to anchor the narrative but also to deepen the thematic exploration of existential and emotional truths. This visual stylization is reminiscent of Fellini's oeuvre, where the mise-en-scène blurs the boundaries between reality and illusion, creating a layered and immersive cinematic experience. The screenplay, penned by K.A. Abbas, incorporates subtle yet incisive critiques of societal norms and the capitalist framework. Through Raju's interactions with various figures within the circus milieu, the film critiques the commodification of human emotions and the superficiality of societal values. This critique is reflective of the Marxist undertones prevalent in much of decadent literature, where the pursuit of material success is often portrayed as a pathway to moral and emotional decay. The depiction of Raju's exploitation for entertainment purposes underscores the dehumanizing effects of a materialistic society, highlighting the hollow pursuit of material gains at the expense of genuine human connection. Raj Kapoor's integration of decadence aesthetics into his cinematic vision results in a profound meditation on the human condition. The narrative structure, emotional depth, and rich visual style collectively explore themes of love, loss, and existential despair, critiquing societal norms while resonating with universal truths about the impermanence of life. This intricate interplay of personal and societal commentary positions the film as a significant work within the tradition of decadent cinema, reflecting both the cultural specificity of Indian cinema and the universal relevance of the aesthetics of decadence. Raj Kapoor's auteurist is perfectly summaried in the opening sequence of his Mera Naam Joker, which serves as a resonating overture for the film's exploration of the human psyche and paradoxical depths. The sequence introduces the protagonist Raju as a wide-eyed young boy, utterly facinated by the idea of a visiting circus troupe. Kapoor's masterful direction blurs the line between objective and subjective realities

through a meticulously constructed montage alternating between intimate close-ups of Raju's amazed closeups and kaleidoscopic shots of the circus's surreal atmosphere. This seamless juxtaposition of the material world and the psychological realm exemplifies Kapoor's singular ability to invite the viewer into the most vivid inner landscapes of his characters' experiences. The circus performances themselves transcend mere entertainments, taking on an dream, symbolism that represents Raju's devloping yearning to escape the confines of his daily existence. The feverish atmosphere is heightened through Kapoor's bold stylistic choices – vivid color palettes, exaggerated camera angles and movements – evoking the mechanics of the unconscious mind. In the same year that 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' was released, Federico Fellini crafted a television film titled 'The Clowns (1970)'. This documentary like film went into Fellini's autobiographical impulses and his fascination with the 'circus-world'. The irony is that Fellini's film, much like Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)', was also considered a disappointment for prominent similar reasons. Both films sought to explore intricate and deeply personal themes in the directors' lives as an artist, utilizing the circus as a metaphor for the theatricality and uncertainity inherent in their own experiences. Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' shows the struggle in human life through the eyes of a circus performer, . Similarly, Fellini's 'The Clowns (1970)' shows the introspection into the 'circus-world' and captures nostalgic and often melancholic childhood obsession of director with circus . Both directors employed the circus motif to show their introspections on life, art, and the quest for meaning. Despite their grandour artistic visions and personal connections to their subjects, both films struggled to resonate with audiences and critics. The challenges stemmed from their overly ambitious narratives and the directors' indulgence in their creative ideas, which at times overshadowed coherent storytelling and emotional engagement. These failures highlight the uncertain balance required in autobiographical cinema, where the director's personal vision must sync with the audience's capacity for empathy and understanding.

### 3.4 Analysis of 'La Strada' and 'Mera Naam Joker'

The archetype of the *Shakespearean fool*, as seen in Shakespeare's classics such as 'King Lear' (Shakespeare, 1606/1997, 1.4.289-290) and 'Twelfth Night' (Shakespeare, 1601/2009, 1.1.1) has a blend of wit, wisdom, and comic relief serving as more than mere entertainers within the narrative. Similarly, Raju and Gelsomina both find themselves thrust into a world characterized by disillusionment and absurdity, where the pursuit of redemption becomes a central theme intertwined with their quest for meaning and purpose. In Shakespearean literature, the evolution of the fool character from mere entertainment to profound social commentary reflects a deeper understanding of their potential within the narrative. Initially, Shakespeare's clowns may exhibit deficiencies in their capacity and efficacy, often limited to providing slapstick humor and superficial entertainment (Bell, 2010). However, as Shakespeare's oeuvre progresses, so too does the role of the fool, transforming from a mere jesting figure to a catalyst for deeper understanding and revelation. Later plays by Shakespeare depict fools who disrupt societal norms more seriously, provoking audiences to question fundamental aspects of identity and reality. These fools challenge conventional wisdom and introduce radically different perspectives, fragmenting perceptions and confusing conceptions of reality (Bell, 2010). Through calculated ambiguity and clever wordplay, Shakespeare's fools engage in a humorous two-step, simultaneously presenting contradictory viewpoints and confounding audiences with their multifaceted nature. Raju's role extends beyond mere entertainment as he becomes a commentator on societal injustices and hypocrisies, challenging norms and exposing deeper truths through humor and satire. Similarly, Gelsomina in 'La Strada (1954)' personifies the Shakespearean fool through her simplicity, innocence, and unwavering commitment to love and compassion. Despite her marginalized status, Gelsomina possesses a profound understanding of human emotions, often revealing truths through her innocent observations and actions. Both are thrusted into a world rife with disillusionment and absurdity, struggling to find a sense in existence. Despite the absurdity, they hold onto a dream of redemption, fuelled by an unwavering quest to find a reason for their existence. In Shakespearean theatre, a clear distinction exists between the buffoonish, rustic clown and the sophisticated, clever fool. Fools, more consciously than clowns, embody representation, performing as if their lives depended on it. Barthes

compared the Eiffel Tower's attraction of meaning to a lightning rod attracting thunderbolts. Similarly, Shakespeare's fools attract meaning, not to collect or display it, but to disseminate it (Bell, 2010). The performance of both the characters are integral to their existence. For Gelsomina, being part of Zampanò's act is not just a job but a defining part of who she is. Similarly, Raju's identity is deeply rooted in his career as a circus clown. Gelsomina's simplicity and childlike demeanor contrast with her profound understanding of love and loneliness. Raju, despite his outwardly jovial nature, grapples with complex emotions and insights about life and human suffering. Both serve as conduits for meaning within their stories. They attract the attention of other characters and the audience, not just for their performances but for the emotional and philosophical messages they convey. Gelsomina's journey highlights themes of purpose and compassion, while Raju's life story reflects on the bittersweet nature of existence and the pursuit of happiness. Similarly, Shakespeare's fools often draw in the audience with their antics only to reveal significant insights about the human condition. This existential struggle is poignantly encapsulated in the 'Sad Clown Paradox', in which the outward appearance of gaiety and humor belies deep inner existential flaw and disillusionment—a theme prevalent in both both Fellini's and Kapoor's narratives. The concept of the 'Sad Clown Paradox' addresses the intriguing phenomenon where individuals known for their humor and ability to make others laugh often struggle with significant mental health issues. This paradox is not simply about the unique psychological profiles of comedians but highlights how humor acts as a coping mechanism for the cognitive stresses of modern life( Smith, D. R. 2022). One prevailing cultural sensibility of our time is a concern with the state of our mental health, another is our desire for a good 'sense of humour'. At present the two are conflated through a paradoxical cultural figure: the sad clown – those who make us laugh the most tend to be the most prone to mental health problems. This article views this 'sad clown paradox' as less about the peculiarity or exceptional status of a comedian's psychology, more about how the cognitive burdens of modernity are rendered bearable and collectively recognised in thought and sentiment by humour" (Smith, 2023). The concept of comic transcendence in modernity, as discussed by Daniel Smith, illuminates how humorists navigate the fragmented nature of contempo-

rary life, capturing both its triumphs and defeats. This paradoxical duality is embodied by the protagonists of Federico Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ and Raj Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’. Gelsomina in ‘La Strada (1954)’ and Raju in ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ reflect the essence of the "Sad Clown Paradox" through their performances that merge deep personal sorrow with moments of comic relief. Their roles mirror Smith's idea that comedians intellectualize individual life problems, sharing their fragmented yet insightful perspectives through humor. As such, these characters epitomize the duality of being thoughtful and insightful while also grappling with self-centeredness and neurosis, thus providing a poignant commentary on the human condition. Through their tragicomic journeys, Gelsomina and Raju transcend mere entertainment, offering profound reflections on life’s complexities in a way that resonates with audiences, much like Shakespeare's fools who disseminate deeper meanings through their ostensibly foolish behavior (Smith, 2023). The sad clown, concludes the tension between the light and dark sides of the existence. While individuals are encouraged to be considerate, receptive, and perceptive, they also struggle with being egocentric, anxious, and self-absorbed. This is clearly shown through the main characters in Federico Fellini's 'La Strada (1954)' and Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)'. Both Gelsomina in ‘La Strada (1954)’ and Raju in ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ portray characters who embody a mix of happiness and inner crisis. Gelsomina's innocent yet profoundly insightful nature and Raju's jovial facade masking his internal struggles highlight the inherent conflict in their characters. These protagonists, much like Shakespeare's fools, use their performances to navigate and express the complexities of the human condition, thereby localizing the twin sides of modern social life within their narratives. Their stories, filled with both laughter and sorrow, poignantly illustrate the dual nexus of the sad clown, making them powerful symbols of comic transcendence in a fragmented world (Smith, 2023).

Giulietta Masina embodies Chaplin’s ethos in her portrayal of Gelsomina in "La Strada (1954)," blending comedy and tragedy in a cinematic performance. Masina’s physical comedy, marked by her vivid mime and innocent demeanor, mirrors the emotional depth of the silent film era, specifically reminiscent of Chaplin’s famous Tramp character. . he character's path includes happy moments mixed with a feeling of sadness, mir-

roring the intricate nature of being human. Masina's talent for expressing a variety of emotions through small gestures and facial expressions showcases her acting skills and is praised as a defining example of Chaplinesque cinema by critics (Bondanella, 1992; Crane, 2023). Raj Kapoor's representation of Raju in ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ is a notable addition to Chaplin in Indian film. Kapoor's character Raju, similar to Chaplin's Tramp, is stuck between the contrasts of joy and sadness, affection and grief. The way he acts involves a intricate combination of feelings, with his humorous gestures masking the character's internal struggles. Kapoor's subtle depiction of Raju's fragility and strength demonstrates his profound insight into the human psyche. Kapoor examines existential themes of identity and purpose in the film's storyline about a clown outside the circus, echoing Chaplin's cinematic inquiries (Garga, 1996; Goldkamp, 2023). Bazin draws a parallel between ‘La Strada (1954)’ and Chaplin’s work, stating, "In this sense there comes to mind also the last film of Chaplin's, although in many ways it is quite different. Of "LimeLight (1952)" too we could say that the cinema was its only adequate incarnation, that it was inconceivable in all other means of expression". Both Zampano and Chaplin’s characters often begin as seemingly simple or comedic figures but unveil complex emotional and spiritual depths, mirroring the journey of Raj Kapoor’s character who also navigates through comedy and tragedy in ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’. André Bazin's analysis of ‘La Strada (1954)’ provides a fertile ground for drawing parallels with Charlie Chaplin's works, particularly in how both filmmakers utilize their medium to convey profound human experiences that transcend the limitations of other art forms (Bazin & Cunneen, 1956). Bazin states that Federico Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ achieves a unique kind of cinematic purity, comparable to Chaplin’s ‘'LimeLight (1952)'.’ He argues that "'LimeLight (1952)'," despite being different in many ways, similarly reaches a level of artistic expression that is conceivable only through cinema: "Of "LimeLight (1952)" too we could say that the cinema was its only adequate incarnation, that it was inconceivable in all other means of expression". Both ‘La Strada (1954)’ and ‘'LimeLight (1952)'’ share a deep emotional resonance and an exploration of the human condition that are emblematic of their respective auteurs. In Chaplin's works, particularly through his iconic character, the Tramp, there is a blend of comedy and pathos that reveals a pro-

found empathy for the underprivileged and the misunderstood. Similarly, in ‘La Strada (1954),’ Fellini portrays Zampano and Gelsomina's journey with a sensitivity that evokes a complex interplay of emotions, leading to a spiritual awakening that is both tragic and beautiful. Chaplin's influence on ‘La Strada (1954)’ is evident in the way both directors use their protagonists to explore themes of loneliness, redemption, and the intrinsic value of human connection. Bazin's admiration for Fellini's ability to evoke such a powerful response from the audience mirrors the impact Chaplin had with his silent films. Bazin notes that Fellini's film, much like Chaplin’s, is not just a narrative but an ‘encounter with an unsuspected universe’. This encounter is facilitated through the protagonists' transformative journeys, which resonate on a deeply human level. The protagonists of ‘La Strada (1954)’ and ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ also bear striking resemblances to Chaplin's characters in their roles as entertainers who mask their inner turmoil with outward performances. Raj Kapoor’s Raju in ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ is akin to Chaplin’s Tramp in his ability to evoke laughter while simultaneously engaging the audience with his poignant personal struggles. Both characters use their performances as a means to cope with and express their innermost feelings, highlighting the duality of their existence as both clowns and tragic figures. In ‘La Strada (1954),’ Zampano's journey from a brute to a man who is crushed by the loss of Gelsomina parallels Chaplin’s narrative arcs, where characters often confront their vulnerabilities and find redemption through profound loss and realization. Bazin eloquently captures this transformation by stating, ‘Zampano will end by being crushed by Gelsomina's absence. Not through remorse, or even by love, but through the overwhelming and incomprehensible sorrow which can be the only sensation of his soul, deprived of Gelsomina"‘. This depth of character development is a hallmark of Chaplin’s storytelling, where the simplicity of the narrative belies the complexity of the characters emotional and spiritual journeys. The protagonists of ‘La Strada (1954)’ and ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ embody the essence of Chaplin’s influence through their emotional depth, the blend of comedy and tragedy, and their ultimate search for redemption and meaning. In ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970),’ Raj Kapoor can be seen mimicking Charlie Chaplin in a circus performance where his character, dressed in Chaplin’s attire, entertains the crowd with exaggerated movements and comi-

cal mishaps. Despite the laughter elicited by his antics—such as battling a slippery chair and confronting an inflatable adversary—Raju's expressive eyes reveal a deep sorrow beneath his painted smile. This duality of humor and melancholy captures the essence of Chaplin's pathos and underscores the film's central theme: the life of a performer who brings joy to others while hiding his own pain. Raju, the clown, performs on the violin at a circus show following his mother's passing, singing with both a smile and tears in his eyes, evoking memories of Charlie Chaplin. This scene in 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' brings back the essence of Chaplin's "The Circus," showcasing the deep contrast between external appearance and internal truth. The movie shows the Joker causing laughter in the world, all the while hiding his own sadness. It reflects Raj Kapoor's own life in an autobiographical manner by capturing the continuity of the Joker's soul in any circumstance. 'Mera Naam Joker (1970) reaches the same philosophical depth as Charlie Chaplin's life, standing at the highest point. Chaplin experienced extreme poverty during his childhood, and he used his comedic persona to hide his inner sadness. Just like Chaplin's renowned 'The Circus,' 'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' also portrays the Joker as a defender of human values in the face of materialistic superficiality. Even though he faced poverty, Raju never lets go of his Joker spirit. The protagonist of the movie showcases the constant poverty and hardship faced by ordinary people, encapsulating the same spirit as the Joker. The movie celebrates the ethics of the underprivileged in each of its three parts, employing the symbol of the Joker. As a student, a circus performer, and a homeless person, Raju celebrates the everyday worker on the street, emphasizing their strength and endurance while maintaining a sense of optimism and humor.

'Mera Naam Joker (1970)' exhibit a obvious resonation with the world of circus, where the surreal and fantastical become inextricably connected with the realms of dreams and romantic narratives. These auteurs show a profound tendency to depict, through the medium of cinema, the metaphysical power of beauty and its psychoanalytical dimensions. The figure of the clown transcends its conventional role as a mere vessel of pathos, metamorphosing into the very embodiment of existential truth itself. Consequently, the fundamental coordinates that define the joker's world become obscured, blurring the demarcations between reality and fiction. Kapoor's 'Mera Naam Joker

(1970)' presents a distinctly unfunny clown whose romantic yearnings border on the pathological, subverting traditional expectations of the clown archetype as discussed above. This departure from convention mirrors Fellini's exploration of the circus-like realm, where monsters and fantasies coalesce with dreams and love stories in a symphony of surrealism. In 'La Strada (1954)' the film's protagonist Gelsomina emerging as an personification of the clown figure transcending mere comedic relief to metamorphose into a poignant vessel for existential truths. Subverting traditional expectations, she is portrayed not as a figure of a clown but rather a tragic soul yearning for love and acceptance in a cruel, unforgiving world - her state becoming a metaphor for the universal human search for meaning and belongingness. Fellini strips away the veneer of the clown's painted character, exposing the raw pathos resonating at the core of human experience, Gelsomina's world an extension of the circus's surreal realm blurring lines between reality and fantasy, a liminal space where monsters coexist with dreams and love stories in choreographed symphony of the absurd. Fellini's masterful direction navigates this circus-like realm unflinchingly, compelling audience confrontation with beauty's paradoxical nature amidst harsh existential realities. Gelsomina's naivete and childlike wonder starkly contrast the cruelty inflicted upon her, underscoring innocence's fragility in a world sorrounded by brutality and indifference. Through her, Fellini challenges conventional clown archetypes, imbuing them with profound pathos transcending entertainment -'La Strada (1954)' becomes a canvas where complexities of love, desire, and the search for meaning.

'La Strada (1954)' is as a powerful demonstration to the director's feminist and empowering portrayal of female characters. The film's tragic heroine, Gelsomina, subverts traditional gender norms, transcending the role of a mere object of 'desire' or 'entertainment'. Fellini imbues her with a depth of emotion and inner trouble that defies stereotypical ortrayals, capturing the essence of the human condition through her profound yearning for love and acceptance. Gelsomina's character arc is a bold confrontation of conventional notions of femininity, imbued with a profound sense of pathos that resonates with the core of human experience. The film's surreal, circus-like realm, juxtaposed with the empathy for Gelsomina's condition and the harsh realities she

faces.Through this unconventional protagonist, Fellini creates a canvas upon which the complexities of love, desire, and the search for meaning are intricately woven, elevating Gelsomina as a symbol of resilience and the feminism. “Feminism was one of Fellini’s touchstones of liberty”. The anger he aroused in feminists later on was caused by his other touchstones, one of them being the liberty to express the full squalor of the male mind. He did it with such bravura that it struck the censorious eye as a boast. It wasn’t, though: it was an abasement, and Anouk Aimée’s tight-lipped fury as Luisa is there to prove it.

*“In “making of the film,” Fellini movingly looked forward to the day when women would give us their view of the world in film. That day hadn’t yet come, and in the meantime, he was stuck with his own stuff (James, 1994).”*

In stark contrast to Fellini's empowering portrayal of women, Raj Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam (1970)’ Joker struggle with clear misogyny and a deep-rooted objectification of the female form. The film's depiction of women as mere objects of male desire and fantasy is a prevalent idea bollywood, reflecting a voyeuristic gaze that keeps on appearing in Raj Kapoor's repertoire. The subtle yet pervasive misogyny webbed throughout the narrative is often conveniently justified through a distorted interpretation of tradition and cultural norms, perpetuating a cycle of oppression and objectification. ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ presents a homogeneous portrayal of women, either as the idealized love interest or the well-endowed object of male gratification, stripping them of agency and depth. Kapoor's film stands as a reminder of the deeply established patriarchal culture that was prevelant in Indian cinema of the time, where women were reduced to mere props in a male-dominated narrative, their complexity largely ignored and had no depth to their story. Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ boldly challenged societal norms and embraced feminism as a liberating force, Mera Naam Joker (1970) remains firmly soaked in a regressive mindset, reflecting the pervasive misogyny that obstruct the representation of women as multidimensional beings with agency and autonomy. Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ portrays women with strong character and empowerment, whereas Mera Naam Joker (1970) fails to uplift or empower its female characters, instead perpetuating a dangerous cycle of oppression and objectification. While Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ uses its narrative to chal-

lenge and overthrow the traditional gender roles, Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ reinforces patriarchal norms, showcasing a sharp difference in the portrayal and empowerment of female characters in these films. This disparity underscores the ongoing struggle for more nuanced and equitable representations of women in global cinema.

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## 4.1 Major Findings of the study

Based on the study, the oveure of Federico Fellini and Raj Kapoor have an enduring mark on global cinema, leaving an lasting legacy. Their respective oeuvres comes as a deep explorations of the human condition, characterized by a unique directorial vision and an unwavering commitment to pushing the boundaries of cinematic language. Fellini's reportire, such as the ‘La Dolce Vita (1960)’ and the introspective ‘8½ (1963)’," serve as quintessential example of Fellini as a auteur director, exhibiting a singular directorial style that is both visually arresting and thematically resonant. Fellini’s surreal, dreamlike aesthetics and extravagant visual spectacles is incredibly juxaposed with his narrative discourse, with in favor of a non-linear, fragmented approach. Fellini's innovative use of the camera, with a dream like editing style, ingrains his films with a hypnotic rhythm that transcends the mere act of storytelling and elevates it to a metaphysical realm. It is within this realm that Fellini's exploration of the human psyche, the complexities of love and desire, and the existentism that plague the human condition truly flourish, establishing him as a auteur who challenges traditional notions of romantic individualism and the artist's persona. Similarly, Raj Kapoor, the celebrated "Showman of Indian Cinema," has burned his name as in important Indian director through his unique visual and storytelling style, which seamlessly blends social commentary, melodrama, and extravagant set pieces. His magnum opus, ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’," stands as a testament to this approach, employing the metaphor of the circus as an analogy to delve into the intricate weave of societal artifice, the complexities of human experience, and the relentless pu suit of happiness amidst life challenges.  Both Fellini and Kapoor have

encapsulates the decadence aesthetics, a distinctive artistic movement that explores themes of corruption, disintegration, and the contrast between appearance and reality. Fellini's critique of society and humanism transcends mere political discourse, rejecting the constraints of socialist realism and delving instead into the metaphysical and psychological depth that comes under human existence. Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’, also incorporates elements of decadence aesthetics, offering a subtle social commentary that is deeply rooted in the cultural and ethical framework of Indian society, blending humanism with a sharp critique of societal norms and the capitalist system. In their portrayal of women, however, Fellini and Kapoor exhibit contrasting perspectives, each symbolism of the socio-cultural background in which they operated. Fellini's ‘La Strada (1954)’ presents a powerful and feministic portrayal of the female character Gelsomina, a protagonist who overthrows traditional gender norms and captures the essence of the human condition through her yearning for love and acceptance. In stark contrast, Kapoor's ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ grapples with the extensive misogyny and objectification of the female form that was deeply rooted in the cultural and ethics of Indian cinema at the time, continuing a cycle of oppression and objectification that stands as a sharp reminder of the ongoing struggle for misogonistic and unbaised representations of women in cinema. The influence of Charlie Chaplin character narratives is deeply evident in the protagonists of ‘La Strada (1954)’ and ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’," Gelsomina and Raju respectively. These characters embody the “Sad Clown Paradox”, where their outward performances of humor and levity mask an inner turmoil and existential struggle that resonates deeply with the human condition. Fellini and Kapoor's films delve into the metaphysical realms and its psychoanalytical dimensions, employing the circus setting as a potent metaphorical stage upon which the universal themes of isolation, suffering, and the yearning for human connection are explored with poetic resonance. The figure of the clown transcends its conventional role as a mere supplier of entertainment, emerging instead as an embodiment of existential truth, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, dreams and love stories.

## 4.2 Conclusion

Through their singular auteuristic visions, Federico Fellini and Raj Kapoor have bequeathed to global cinema an enduring philosophical exploration of the human condition's paradoxes. Employing the subversiveaesthetics of Decadence, their respective films unravel the differences between society's appearance and the innermost yearnings that underpin our existential crisis. Fellini's ovure transcend cinematic languages, transforming into profound psychological analogy where dreams intermingle with desire amidst a carnival of absurdness. Kapoor's oeuvre, ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’, echoes the Felliniesque ethos - the circus becominging a metaphysical kaleidoscope refracting the bittersweet duality of the human experience. Yet where Fellini boldly subverted conformist ideologies to champion an empowered feminine gaze, Kapoor's vision remained ensnared within the patriarchal biases of his cultural milieu. This differences underscores how artistic expression, however transcendent, remains tethered to the socio-political realities that bounds it. Nonetheless, their similarites endures - for in the tragic-comic pathos of the "Sad Clown Paradox" protagonists, one observes the immortal sadneess of Charlie Chaplin's character passedthrough a postmodern kaleidoscope of absurdities in characters of ‘Mera Naam Joker (1970)’ and ‘La Strada (1954)’.Ultimately, by placing the circus as an metaphor of humanity's deepest yearnings, Fellini and Kapoor have crafted an enduring legacy their a oeuvres representing cinema magic at its peak, forging the mundane and the surreal into deep explorations of our innermost strivings for connection, purpose and identity. As maestros of the human condition's themes, their visionary expressions will resonate across cultures and eras as timeless testimony to the transcendent potential of cinema. These surreal, circus-like realms challenge notions of romantic individualism and the artist's persona, inviting audiences to confront the complexi ties of love, desire, and the eternal search for meaning that underpins the human experience.

# REFERENCES


Bazin, A., & Cunneen, J. E. (1956). La Strada. CrossCurrents, 6(3), 200-203. Wiley. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24456671

Bell, R. H. (2010). Motley to the View: The Shakespearean Performance of Folly. Southwest Review, 95(1/2), 44-62. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/43473037

Bondanella, P. (1992). The Cinema of Federico Fellini. Princeton University Press.

Broutman, J., Federico Fellini, Bondanella, P., McCarthy, P., Cohen, J., Federico, G., Roberto Rossellini, Andre Bazin, Marxists, & French. (1954). Fellini's Neo-realism: Fellini's criticism of ideology in La Strada and La Dolce Vita. In G. Shaya & Venice Film Festival, History 209: Europe, 1945 to the Present (p. Broutman 2).

Bawa, R. (2018). PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE CINEMA OF RAJ KAPOOR: A CASE STUDY OF SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDARAM, PREM ROG AND RAM TERI GANGA MAILI. International Journal of Research, 5(12), 5297-5309. Retrieved from https://journals.pen2print.org/index.php/ijr/article/view/14994/14593

Chesler, J. (1977). [Review of The Cinema of Federico Fellini, by S. Rosenthal]. Cinema Journal, 17(1), 44–46. https://doi.org/10.2307/1225469

Crane, H. (2023). Chaplinesque Analysis. https://www.enotes.com

de Palacio, J. (1990). Pierrot fin-de-siècle. Paris: Séguier.

Di Chiara, F., & Van Den Oever, A. (2013). Federico Fellini and the experience of the grotesque and carnavalesque. In Sam Stourdzé, Marente Bloemheuvel, & Jaap Guldemond (Eds.), NECSUS 4 EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF MEDIA STUDIES: Vol. VOL. 2 (Issue NO. 2) [Journal-article]

Drake, R. (1982). Decadence, Decadentism and Decadent Romanticism in Italy: Toward a Theory of Decadence. Journal of Contemporary History, 17(1), 69–92. http://www.jstor.org/stable/260445

Fellini, F. (Director). (1954). La Strada [Film]. Ponti-De Laurentiis Cinematografica

Garga, B. L. (1996). So many cinemas: the motion picture in India. Eminence Designs.

Gill, R. B. (2007). Fellini's 8½ and the Comic Sense of Life. CEA Critic, 69(3), 65–76. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44377660

Goldkamp, H. (2023). On Hart Crane's Chaplinesque. Annulet Poetics Journal. Kornhaber, D. (2022).

Hayes, M. (2005). Psychoanalysis & the films of Federico Fellini. Pace University. http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=honorscollege_theses

James, C. (1994, March 14). MONDO FELLINI. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/03/21/mondo-fellini

Joad, C. E. M. (1950). Decadence. A philosophical inquiry. the Journal of Philosophy/the Journal of Philosophy, 47(22), 637. https://doi.org/10.2307/2021797

Kael, P. (1963). Circles and Squares. Film Quarterly, 16(3), 12–26. https://doi.org/10.2307/1210726

Kapoor, R. (Director). (1970). Mera Naam Joker [Film]. R. K. Films.

Notes on Auteur Theory in 1962 (A. Sarris, Trans.). (1962). Film Culture, NO. 27 WINTER. https://archive.org/download/film-culture-1962-no-27/film-culture-1962-no-27.pdf

Pendleton, D. (2012, September 6). Raj Kapoor and the Golden Age of Indian Cinema - Harvard Film Archive. Harvard Film Archive. Retrieved June 2, 2024, from https://harvardfilmarchive.org/programs/raj-kapoor-and-the-golden-age-of-indian-cinema

Rasch, W. (1982). Literary Decadence Artistic Representations of Decay. Journal of Contemporary History, 17(1), 201–218. http://www.jstor.org/stable/260451

Rohdie, S. (2002). Fellini Lexicon. In British Film Institute eBooks. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781838710811

Smith, D. R. (2022). The sad clown paradox: A theory of comic transcendence. International Journal of Cultural Studies, 26(1), 87–103. https://doi.org/10.1177/13678779221117176

Staples, D. E. (1966). The Auteur Theory Reexamined. Cinema Journal, 6, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/1225411

Stubbs, J. C. (1993b). The Fellini manner: open form and visual excess. Cinema Journal, 32(4), 49. https://doi.org/10.2307/1225710

Thakor, H. (2020, December 18). 50th Anniversary of Raj Kapoor Classic 'Mera Naam Joker'| Countercurrents. Countercurrents. https://countercurrents.org/2020/12/50th-anniversary-today-of-raj-kapoor-classic-mera-naam-joker/

Vijayalakshmi. (2020, December 23). 50 yrs of Mera Naam Joker: A feminist exploration of why it was way ahead of its time. Women's Web. https://www.womensweb.in/2020/12/mera-naam-joker-a-masterpiece-dec20wk4sr/

Waller, M., Gubareva, M., & Burke, F. (2020). *A Companion to Federico Fellini* (1st ed.). [Excerpt]. Publisher

# APPENDIX

**Figure 1:** Screengrab from *La Strada* (Fellini, 1954), Gelsomina meets a kindred marginal figure, Osvaldo and leaving with Zampano from her home.

**Figure 2:** Screengrab from *Mera Naam Joker* (Kapoor, 1970), depicting the protagonist's early life experiences and his last performance.